

## The Man, the Woman, and the Watcher

It doesn't matter what day it was. It doesn't matter how the situation came to be. All that matters is that three people left a situation feeling profoundly different than when they first became involved. We'll call them the man, the woman, and the watcher.

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The watcher had been minding his own business, mundanely folding laundry in his bedroom. The screen on his window couldn't filter the emotions that floated into his room from outside; a quiet conversation had escalated to an aggressive shouting match that the watcher could no longer ignore. Attempting to literally shut out the sound, the watcher moved over to the window of his second story bedroom with every intention of closing it, pulling the blinds, and moving on to folding the boxer briefs that slowly wrinkled at the bottom of his laundry basket. Instead, he sat on the edge of his bed and watched the end of the man and the woman's relationship unfold itself right before his very eyes.

The man stood on the side of an agape driver door of the woman's '04 Jeep Durango; the woman was parked in the middle of an alleyway outside of the apartment complex; she sat in the driver's seat, and her face was obstructed from the view of the watcher by the tinted windshield of her vehicle. *How inconvenient*, the watcher thought to himself, as he wondered what the woman looked like.

"It was your choice! It was your choice to walk away before, it's your choice if you do it now," the man said between puffs of smoke on his burning cigarette. He paced between the parked car and the door of his apartment nervously as the woman spoke. The watcher leaned forward as he strained to hear the woman's reply; his nose was nearly touching the screen of his window; he could smell the man's secondhand smoke – the woman's voice was

drowned out by the loud acceleration of a Harley. The watcher cursed under his breath at the tattooed driver for being so inconsiderate of those that actually lived in the area who appreciated some peace and quiet.

The man continued, “you’re right, I ain’t got any money. You ain’t got any money. No one’s got any god damned money. But the apartment is paid until the end of the month. We have until the end of the month!”

The watcher could hear the desperation in the man’s voice as he pleaded with the woman. Again, her reply was muffled, and not from a noisy passerby, but from the inconvenient positioning of the woman seated inside her car; her voice did not carry up to the window that the watcher eavesdropped from.

“Give me an example. Please, give me – ”

This time the watcher could hear the woman clearly as she cut off the man, “Everything! Fucking everything!”

“Oh, everything, huh? What about last summer? What about three fucking months ago when I paid for four months of rent in advance?”

The man would never get a reply to his question for a car pulled into the alleyway behind the Durango; the woman was forced to pull forward out of the way and park. *What is the deal with all the traffic today?* the watcher pondered. As the eyes of the man and the watcher glued themselves to the woman and her Durango, they both wondered the same thing; whether the woman was going to continue the conversation, or drive away.

The woman got out of the jeep, slammed her door and stormed over to the man.

“You wanna talk? Let’s fucking talk” the woman yelled. She was standing inches from the man’s face. Without looking away from the woman, he flicked his cigarette butt to the ground.

“I ain’t got nothin’ to do with you walkin’ out before. You did it once, you’ll do it again.”

“You made me do it! I didn’t fucking want to. But I had to!”

“Every choice is your own. You make ‘em outside of any action of mine. You did it once, you’ll do it again.”

“You’re right; I took the car and left. I ain’t scared to do it again, either. But I don’t want to!”

“Damn straight you’ll do it again.”

At this comment, the woman suddenly raised herself on her tiptoes, bringing herself eyelevel with the man while she simultaneously raised her fist to his face.

“What? Ya gonna hit me, again?” the man said unflinchingly as he mocked the woman. The woman’s index finger extended from her fist and pointed right at the man’s nose.

“Ooooh, you better get this through your thick skull; I’m here talking to you, ain’t I? I don’t have to be here. I could be somewhere else, but I’m here!”

The man scoffed at the woman - “then fucking leave. If you have somewhere else to be, then leave, damn it. Just like you did before.”

The man turned his back on the woman and began walking toward his apartment.

“Don’t you walk away from me! You wanted to talk, didn’t ya!? Well, let’s fucking talk!”

The man turned around where he stood, he did not move closer to the woman, and he said very matter-of-factly, “yeah, I did wanna talk. But I don’t wanna talk unless you calm down and talk to me in a rationalized manner. I ain’t doin’ this shit outside anymore. Calm down, and then we can talk.”

“If you walk into that apartment, we’re done. You get that? Over! Done!”

“Yeah, I got it. Don’t fucking worry.”

The man turned his back on the woman and walked inside the apartment.

The woman screamed in frustration. Both of her fists thudded loudly and fiercely against the hood of the man’s parked car four times. She spit in the stones. “Fuck you!” she screamed. She lumbered over to her Durango, threw a pair of sunglasses against the yellow siding of the man’s apartment building, and slammed her car door shut. The watcher, motionless and silent throughout the entire exchange of the man and the woman assumed at this point that the woman began to punch something within her jeep, maybe the steering wheel, for loud thuds emitted from the vehicle. The woman then peeled out of the alleyway

with an impressive five second peel; the watcher counted. Stones flicked against the man's parked car and sprinkled the yellow siding of his apartment with dark flecks.

The watcher sat on the edge of his bed a moment, his hands folding, unfolding and then refolding the same yellow t-shirt. His eyes stared blankly out the window while his mind wandered on through the alley; it had never been his intention to intrude on such an intimate moment between two people. Yet, the words of the man resonated deeply with him; "every choice is your own." The watcher could have shut his window, pulled his blinds, and let the man and the woman experience this scene alone. And still, the watcher couldn't help but think that had he not witnessed this tornado of a relationship, who would have? An obnoxious teen who would have made snide comments in a derogatory fashion? An old lady who would have told the man and the woman to keep it down? A parent concerned about the virgin ears of their toddler telling the man and the woman to take it indoors? Had someone else watched and intervened, would the ending of the relationship unfolded differently?

Feeling as though he himself had caused the end of the man and woman's relationship, the watcher stood up to finally close the window and pull down the blinds just as the man came outside of his apartment. The man dawdled over to the sunglasses that sat in the stones, dragging his feet and smoking a new cigarette. He bent down, picked up the sunglasses, and walked to his car. He pulled the Detroit baseball cap that he was wearing down over his eyes and rested his hands in his face while his elbows rested on top of his car. The man stood that way for a long time. The watcher stood frozen in his bedroom, watching the man stand there; if the man were to look up, he would see the watcher in plain view watching him. Would the man know that the watcher had seen the man's heart break? Would the man be reassured that the feeling of being watched was real instead of a fabricated feeling created from the anxiety of the fight with the woman? The watcher would never know, for the man never looked up. He wiped his eyes and walked back into his apartment.

The watcher closed the window, wrapped his trembling fingers around the fraying fringe at the bottom of his blinds, and slowly pulled it down over the window. He took a

step back from his bed where all of his freshly washed boxer briefs, athletic socks, jeans and t-shirts lay neatly folded and stacked; where he had allowed himself to witness that which was not a scene he should have witnessed. The pressure of each article of clothing on the one below it had caused each pile to tilt slightly. The watcher picked up each pile, one by one, and launched them at the ceiling fan so it spewed them all across the floor; threw them at the desk he had strenuously organized just minutes before the man and the woman had stepped into the alley, stepped into his life; hurled them at the full length mirror that leaned against his bedroom wall, knocking it to the ground and shattering it to tiny little pieces. He watched his reflection walk out of the room in distorted fragments.